

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 0877

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT MARR NATO IC

SUBJECT: ICELAND'S NATIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: REYKJAVIK 0844

1. I TALKED YESTERDAY ABOUT THE UPCOMING NATIONAL ELECTIONS WITH JOHANN HAFSTEIN, FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND FORMER CHAIRMAN OF INDEPENDENCE PARTY (IP). HAFSTEIN PREDICTS THAT IP WILL GAIN AT LEAST 2 MORE SEATS BUT NOT MORE THAN 5. THAT IS, IP WILL COME OUT OF THE ELECTION WITH FROM 24 TO 27 SEATS. HE PREDICTS SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WILL WIN FROM 4 TO 5 SEATS, COMPARED WITH PRESENT TOTAL OF 6. HE BELIEVES OLL WILL WIN 3 SEATS BECAUSE OF KARVEL PALMASON; THE COMMUNIST PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (PA) WILL INCREASE ITS SEATS TO 12 FROM CURREN TLEVEL OF 10; AND PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PP) WILL BE THE MAJOR LOSER.

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HE SAID IT WOULD HAVE TO BE A LANDSLIDE RIGHTIST VICTORY

FOR THE IP-SDP COMBINATION TO WIN 32 SEATS, WHICH IS THE NUMBER NEEDED TO GOVERN AS A MAJORITY BECAUSE OF THE TWO-HOUSE PARLIAMENT. HE DOUBTED THIS WOULD OCCUR. HE JOINS WITH ALL OTHER FORECASTERS IN PREDICTING A 30-30 STALEMATE OR AT BEST 31-29 IN IP-SDP FAVOR.

2. HAFSTEIN STATED HE FORESEES AN IP MINORITY GOVT EVEN IF THE IP-SDP COMBINATION TOTALS 32. HE SAID SDP WANTS TO REGAIN STANDING AS A LEFTIST PARTY, AND ALTHOUGH SDP WILL NOT JOIN IN A PP-PA-OLL COMBINATION, THUS PREVENTING THEM FROM FORMING A GOVT, IT WILL NOT JOIN WITH IP EITHER. SDP STRATEGY, HE SAID, IS TO GO IT ALONE, TO BE COURTED BY BOTH THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT, BUT WILL SUPPORT IP ON DEFENSE ISSUES AND SELECTIVE OTHER ISSUES. THUS, WE HAVE ANOTHER COALITION POSSIBILITY TO ADD TO THOSE ENUMERATED IN REFTEL. UNDER AN IP MINORITY GOVT HAFSTEIN SAID NEW ELECTIONS WOULD BE CALLED IN SPRING 1975.

3. HAFSTEIN SAID TOO MUCH ANIMOSITY EXISTS WITHIN THE IP FOR THE PP TO PERMIT FORMATION OF AN IP-PP COALITION, AND THAT THE ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE PARTIES ARE TOO DIVERGENT. HE SAID SEVERAL KEY PP MEMBERS HAVE MADE OVERTURES TO IP INDICATING THEY HAVE A FLEXIBLE DEFENSE POLICY WHICH COULD ACCOMMODATE ITSELF TO IP VIEWS IF AN IP-PP COALITION WERE TO BE CONSIDERED, BUT IP LEADERS ARE NOT, AT THIS TIME AT ANY RATE, INTERESTED. HAFSTEIN CLAIMS A SENSIBLE RESOLUTION OF THE BASE RETENTION ISSUE ALONG IP LINES CAN BE REACHED WITHOUT EITHER THE SDP OR THE PP IN THE GOVT.

4. COMMENT: IF AN IP-SDP COMBINATION WINS 32 SEATS, IT WOULD BE MOST IMPLAUSIBLE FOR THE SDP TO REFUSE TO HELP FORM THE GOVT. HAFSTEIN IS REPEATING THE LINE SDP CHAIRMAN GYLFI GISLASON IS PASSING OUT SO AS TO PREVENT ANNIHILATION OF HIS PARTY. SDP ADMITTEDLY IS SUFFERING FROM TOO MUCH "ME-TO" WITH THE IP, BUT ONCE THE ELECTION IS OVER, IT WOULD HAVE MORE TO GAIN THAN LOST IF IT JOINED THE GOVT. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE LEARNED TO BELIEVE ALMOST ANYTHING IN ICELANDIC POLITICS, WE FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THIS ONE.

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5. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS REACHED THE PERSONAL ABUSE NAME-CALLING STAGE. NONE OF THE LEADERS OF ANY OF THE PARTIES IS BEING LEFT OUT. THE PA SEEMS TO BE CONCENTRATING ITS CAMPAIGN THIS PAST WEEK ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON THE DEFENSE ISSUE (ICELAND OUT OF NATO; IDF OUT OF ICELAND), WHEREAS THE IP IS NOW DEVOTING SOME TIME TO THE ECONOMIC ISSUE AS WELL.

6. WITH ONLY THREE DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS NOTHING SIGNIFICANT HAS TAKEN PLACE TO ALTER THE PREDICTIONS OF A RIGHT/LEFT STALEMATE. THE ONLY PREDICTION THAT SEEMS TO HAVE COMMON AGREEMENT IS THAT BOTH THE IP AND THE COMMUNISTS WILL GAIN.

7. ELECTION RESULTS WILL BE KNOWN BY ABOUT 4 IN THE MORNING JULY 1ST WASHINGTON TIME. FORMATION OF A GOVT WILL TAKE AT LEAST A COUPLE OF WEEKS, BUT MOST LIKELY LONGER.
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